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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0231
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 6966
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 7288
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2610
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 5332
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 6471
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3044
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 0251
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 4608
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2323
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 3529
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000435

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NEPAL: ELECTION OF NEW PRIME MINISTER MAY OCCUR
MAY 23

REF: KATHAMNDU 372

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Randy W. Berry. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Caretaker Prime Minister Dahal's address to the Constituent Assembly on May 22 paves the way for holding an election of a new Prime Minister on May 23. Former Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist General Secretary Madhav Nepal is currently the only candidate. It may still take a week before the full cabinet can be presented and sworn-in. The potential for Maoist disruption of the vote is still real.

PM Addresses Parliament

¶2. (U) Caretaker Prime Minister Pushpa Dahal's 35-minute address to the Constituent Assembly (CA) on the afternoon of May 22 paves the way to hold an election in the parliament of a new Prime Minister on May 23. The Maoists had been disrupting all legislative business since the Prime Minister submitted his resignation May 4 (reftel). Dahal defended the actions of his government and restated his party's commitment to the peace process and drafting a new constitution. After the speech CA Chairman Subash Nemwang was expected to read letters from President Ram Baran Yadav announcing the PM's resignation and calling for election of a majority government. (Note: The CA session was ongoing at close of business.) A meeting of the CA Business Affairs Committee had been called following the CA session to discuss election procedures and the Maoist's controversial resolution condemning the President's reinstatement of Chief of Army Staff General Katawal.

Expected Election Procedures

¶3. (U) The CA Chairman/Secretariat has already announced that the election of the new Prime Minister is scheduled for 3 p.m. local time on May 23. The sole confirmed candidate is former Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal, who appears to enjoy a

comfortable majority. If the Maoists decide not to file a rival candidate then the vote may be conducted by acclamation, or voice vote. (Note: Local press had reported the Maoists were considering nominating Jhakku Prasad Subedi, the candidate who defeated Madhav Nepal in Kathmandu-2 in the CA election in April 2008.) If the Maoists file a rival candidate for the office of prime minister, then the candidates would likely be voted on in the order their nominations were filed.

Next Steps

¶4. (C) If MK Nepal is elected Prime Minister on May 23, it may still take a week before the full cabinet can be presented and sworn-in. Negotiations as to which party will receive which portfolios have been delayed as the potential coalition partners waited to see whether MK Nepal would actually become the new PM, and by parties such as Madhesi People's Rights Forum having difficulty deciding whether they would try to claim ministries or support the government from outside. Sunil Pant, a CA member from the small CPN-United, told Emboff May 19 that his party's main objective was to influence the drafting of the new constitution and the party had neither the desire nor appropriate personnel to lay claim to ministerial positions. Sujata Koirala, Nepali Congress (NC) Central committee member and daughter of NC President GP Koirala, told Emboff May 21 that party leaders who thought the government was weak and short-lived were not lobbying hard to become ministers. Others, however, were unsure they

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wanted to take the risk of being left out in case the government did last and successfully oversee drafting of the new constitution.

Comment

¶5. (C) While today's session of the CA is encouraging, it does not guarantee the election will occur on May 23. The Maoist's announced May 21 that if the CA did not debate their resolution they might resume disrupting all CA business. At the end of his speech Dahal stated that he was assured the CA would discuss the proposal, but the other parties have announced that they believe the proposal is unconstitutional and thus cannot be brought to the floor for a debate and vote. The possibility of Maoist disruption is still real.
POWELL